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What options are available for joint operation/manning of a Saudi-owned AWACS and associated ground environment? Which would be most beneficial from the standpoint of the Gulf defense generally?

(U) At a minimum, maintaining Saudi AWACS aircraft will require the continuous participation of approximately 100 US technicians for the life of the aircraft. The same is true for the Saudi F-15 and tanker aircraft programs. Also necessary for Saudi operation of AWACS and other systems will be continuous provision by the US of spare parts and other logistical support, including depot level maintenance outside of Saudi Arabia.

(U) Beyond these factors, a number of options exist for establishing routine US participation in the actual operation of the Saudi air defense system. For instance, the Saudis could agree to the stationing of US advisors with their AWACS and ground based radar units. The role of these advisors could range from observation and provision of technical advice to participation in the planning and conduct of air surveillance operations.

(U) At the high-participation end of the spectrum, a joint US-Saudi team could be created which would have exclusive authority to approve fragmentary orders (i.e., mission profiles) for AWACS flights. In other schemes, joint manning arrangements could be limited to maintenance teams, AWACS mission crews, and/or ground based components of the Saudi air

surveillance system. Joint manning of AWACS-associated message processing centers (MPCs) would allow us to monitor the data transmitted by AWACS.

(C) Judgments of the relative benefits of each of these options for air defense of the Gulf region must weigh their technical merits against their political costs and risks. Broadly speaking, those options with the highest levels of US involvement provide the most promising technical bases for a regional air defense system. This is chiefly because constraints on the Saudis' technical manpower would limit their ability to organize and manage a multi-nation air defense system. On the other hand, most of the Gulf states would probably find it easier to join a system in which US involvement was less obvious. Thus, arrangements which are characterized by a balance between Saudi operation and US participation hold the most promise for evolving into a regional air defense system.